

## Transcription: Bob Steinman

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*Today is Thursday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012. My name is James Crabtree. This morning I'll be interviewing Mr. Bob Steinman. This interview is taking place in person at the Armed Forces Museum here at Camp Mabry, in Austin, Texas, and it's being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you for taking the time to talk to us today.*

**Bob Steinman:** I appreciate you coming out.

*Yes sir, well it's an honor for us. The first question I always like to start with is to ask you to tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you went into the military.*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, I grew up in Waco, Texas. My brother was in World War II. He was on the Destroyer Pacific with Halsey's taskforce, and I guess that's where I kind of got my hankering to join the Navy there. Not only Waco was and is kind of a blah place, so I decided it was time to try to get out and see the world a little bit. But I graduated from Waco High School and then after that, I was going to go to college, but the parents didn't have the finances and everything like that, and so I started working with a paint and wallpaper store and I ended up within a year I was the assistant manager and then went on to manager of that. I graduated from high school when I was just barely 16. I got caught up in that where they would double promote you if you took a test in through there, and so I didn't go through the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, so I went from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade on into the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. It wasn't the best thing because I was so much younger than 90 percent of the other kids there and everything, but it was good and so I made it through. I graduated from Waco High in 1954, in May of '54, and in March of '54 I turned 16. So I kind of got out in the world pretty early. But anyway I went on and I worked at the paint and wallpaper store for two and a half years. The individual that owned it ended up selling it. Then I went to work as the assistant manager at Sherman Williams in Waco. I did that until I actually joined the Navy.

*You mentioned your brother was in World War II.*

**Bob Steinman:** Right.

*Were you old enough to remember him being away?*

**Bob Steinman:** Oh yes, I remember that period of time very, very – I've got a good vision of it. I remember going out and we lived on the corner there in Waco, and I'd go around all through the neighborhood and collect scrap iron, and we'd put it on the corner and they'd come pick it up once a week. I even crushed up my old tricycle. I was helping my brother, you know, and donated that and I very strongly remember the rationing and everything that went with it. My dad was a structural mechanic on B-25's at Lackland Army Air Base there in Waco. I remember the old "paid" for the gas that was on the windshield, and he was able to get tires a little better than most people because being a defense worker, and back then tires, because of rubber and everything, they didn't have the nylon tires out yet, they were very hard to come by. I remember, too, that my parents had some good friends that ran a slaughterhouse there in Waco, so we'd go down, and we ate a lot of chickens. I raised chickens. We ate a lot of chicken because you couldn't get good beef, and if you could, you couldn't afford it. I did eat a little bit of horse meat during that timeframe, too. But times were really tough back then.

*Did you hear much from your brother in terms of letters?*

**Bob Steinman:** Not a whole lot because they were bouncing around in that Destroyer, the USS Porterville 8682, I would like to say was in with Halsey's taskforce, and he was a radar radioman operator, and he told me about the big typhoon that Admiral Halsey took 'em through in which they lost three ships with all hands and everything. He said that they were steaming along and the weather was very, very bad, and all of a sudden on the radar blip the destroyer outboard on the starboard side just disappeared from the blip. And then about two or three hours later, the destroyer escort on the port side disappeared with all hands. And so they were just barely being able to stay afloat and they were all wondering if they were next. So anyway, no, I remember the timeframe very well. In fact, I'm a World War II historian, and I told you about my museum and everything. But that's just a timeframe that children today have no idea, no concept of what happened. I do a lot, I mentor at Chisholm Trail middle school there in Round Rock, and I give talks and everything, and they have no concept. I'll ask them who is their president, and they couldn't tell me that. Who authorized the dropping of the atomic bomb? What countries were involved in World War II? And they just don't know. They're not taught anything anymore. And just like the saying goes, that's the greatest generation because, and I tell them, too, I said you know, these people sacrificed very, very dearly because of their involvement and everything, and if it wouldn't be for them, we might be speaking German or Japanese right now. And I said anytime you see a World War II vet, you need to go up and congratulate him and thank him for his service. Anytime I meet 'em down here, when I meet a World War II vet, I ask him if he has written anything or recorded anything, and I would tell them all that if they don't have a recorder, I will furnish them a recorder if they will just record some of their history, because it is history. Their stories are history and it needs to be preserved for future generations.

*That's right. Now with your brother, do you remember when he got back home? Tell us about that day a little bit.*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, when he got back home of course my mother was always a worrier, and she always worried about him, and then when he was coming back home, she worried about him getting home all right and everything, but we had a big celebration when he got in. He got into the Navy right out of high school and he was eleven years older than I was, so we had a big celebration and everything, and I had my little, she made me a little Navy uniform and all. In fact, I'll show you a picture in here, too. But yeah, I was all Navy.

*So you knew early on because of really a strong influence from your brother that the Navy was something you wanted to do. So tell us about when you enlisted.*

**Bob Steinman:** I enlisted in March of 1958. I went in and enlisted in the Naval Reserve, and against the will of my mother. I already had one son that went into that, I don't want you to do it, too. I said mother, I really feel I need to do this. And that was strictly voluntary, and so I was at the Naval Reserve training center and I had gone on the Reserve training crews out in New Orleans like that on the destroyer escort, and I made the outstanding Reservist in the 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District. So there's a little write-up in the paper and stuff like that. And so they at the same time, they were wanting more people to go into the TAR, as a Training Active Reservist, that's a Reserve on active duty, and be instructors and everything, but the requirement at that time was that you had to do two years' active duty before you were eligible. And I said I wondered if they, I talked to my CO, and said I wondered if they would consider me. He said well, all you can do is try. He said I'll be glad to write you an endorsement and everything like that, a

recommendation. I said well let's do it. About a month later after I sent my request in, they came back with a set of orders for me. So I went down to New Orleans to instructor training school down there for six weeks, and then when I got ready to be assigned, I asked them what – at that particular time they couldn't send me out of the 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District. I would have to be within the 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District, and that was Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas. So the only place in Texas that they had open at the time was El Paso. Well, I really kind of wanted to stay in Texas, so I said OK, I'll take that. Well about a week before we were ready to transfer out and transfer down there, the administrative clerk there down in New Orleans called me up and said hey, we got an opening there in Waco. Would you like to go back to Waco? Oh yeah, that would be great. So I was married at the time, too, and so anyway I got orders and a month and a half away, I got sent right back to Waco and I stayed there for three and a half years.

*Your job was to help train the Reservists?*

**Bob Steinman:** Right, I was in the administrative division. I could type.

*After all this though, you had gone to basic training.*

**Bob Steinman:** Oh yes, San Diego. 13 weeks in San Diego.

*So you did that and then until you got the active duty orders, you were doing one weekend a month type of training as a Reservist?*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, at that particular time, we trained every Wednesday. We didn't spend a whole weekend like that. And then later on, it went, well in fact after I left, and I left in '62, got orders, and in the meantime they decided to do away with the surface active duty, the TAR program. So I wrote a letter and requested activation into the regular Navy, in other words get out of the Reserves and go into the regular Navy, and I was accepted. About I guess two weeks after I got my acceptance into the regular Navy, the chief of staff from New Orleans came up and said hey, we're reopening that, we're not gonna close it down. He said I would be glad to give you another tour here, another three years here. And he was a Navy captain, and I said captain, I said no, I think I would rather go ahead and go on into the Navy because right here I don't feel like I'm a sailor or in the Navy, so I'd like to see what the rest of the Navy is like. I kind of felt like I was babysitting a bunch of Reservists. And he said I understand what you're saying, I don't blame you at all, but I just wanted to, you've got an outstanding record here and I wanted to see if you would consider it. I said at this particular time I don't think so. And so I put in what we call a dream sheet, that's where you would like to go. And I didn't know because I hadn't been in the Navy and I didn't know you were supposed to split your coast. So I put in for a tender on the West Coast at San Diego and also in Florida. Well I got a destroyer out of Long Beach, California. So I called up the dispatcher and told him, I said I didn't say anything about a destroyer out of Long Beach. I didn't want a destroyer. And he said well, I'll put your name back in the pot. Well two weeks later, I got orders to a different destroyer on Long Beach. And so I went in and talked to the commanding officer and said I had never been to an actual administrative school and I was a second class at the time petty officer, and I would like to at least go to a school before I get out in the fleet. He said well, we can take care of that. So he got me to sea school out in San Diego. And sea school at that time was just an advanced course in administration like that. The administration part was I took care of all the administrative duties and everything, plus personnel records and everything else like that. I was a yeoman, and yeoman normally do the administrative. They had a personnel that took care of the enlisted personnel records, and the yeoman normally took care of the officer records. So anyway I went

out there and went through the sea school, and while I was out there, they asked for volunteers for submarines. And there were seven of us in that school that volunteered for subs. So directly from there, we went to New London, Connecticut, to submarine school.

*What was it that attracted you to the submarine, sir?*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, a couple of things. I talked to a couple of guys that were on subs, you know, superiority 4 and everything like that, it was a pretty elite group of people. Plus, you got extra pay. You got submarine pay. And they were talking about some of the operations that they did and everything. A submarine is primarily an intelligence gathering platform, plus to sink enemy ships and various things like that. But the operations they told me about sounded very interesting, and so that's I guess the big reason, plus I didn't want to take a chance getting on a tin can out in the middle of the North Atlantic in the storms and everything. So I said naw, let's just go with the subs. So there were several of us that went in.

*So you say you went to New London, Connecticut, for your submarine training.*

**Bob Steinman:** Right.

*Tell us a little bit about that, what the training was that was different from being on a ship on the surface.*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, on the submarine, to get your silver dolphins, and silver dolphins are the enlisted dolphins, go to the officers, you had to be able to do everything that everybody else does. In other words, you had to be able to fire the torpedo, surface, compensate for the water and everything else like that, navigate, and then on the nuclear boats you had to even be able to strand the reactor because on a submarine you never know when you're in the only person alive in that compartment, and you can make the difference whether that submarine surfaces or it sinks with all hands. So it's not something that you take lightly. I mean nobody's gonna be a good old boy and sign you off on that because their life depends on what I know and what I can do. It's everybody. So you get those dolphins, and man, that's just like a pilot getting wings, no different. So I guess I don't know if you'd say we're a cocky bunch, but we're proud of having those dolphins and being able to wear them. It takes about a year to qualify to get those.

*And you learned that kind of through OJT.*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, we learned part of it through sub school, and then of course you don't know what, - now during sub school, they have a bunch of still of the old fleet boats, the World War II boats as training boats - and you didn't know what type of class of boat you'd go to, so they're all different. While I was in submarine school, that's when the Cuban missile crisis came out. So they took everybody that had been at least halfway through, 50 percent of the way through sub school, and put them on one of those boats loaded with warhead torpedoes and sent us there in Cuba. So we spent about a month and a half down there and then we came back, finished our school and graduated. Then we put in, like I say, our green sheet again. And I put in for a sub out of Hawaii in San Diego. Well I got a submarine out of Charleston, South Carolina, and so there again, too, I knew you can talk to the detailer. And another guy from the East Coast wanted to go back to the East Coast, and so I called him up and gave him the spill that he would be happier, I would be happier, if we got where we wanted to go, and why can't we just swap? And I'm from Texas so it wouldn't cost anymore to move me either way. He said well, let me see what's available. And so he checked it and he got back with me and said well, I

had put in for a nuclear boat, but back in that timeframe, there were about five of them around and that was it. And so he said well, how about a fast attack nuclear boat out of Hawaii? I said that's exactly what I want! I said I'll take it. And so I got it and went out to Hawaii.

*What ship was that?*

**Bob Steinman:** The USS Sea Dragon, SSN584.

*Tell us about that submarine, how many were on the crew and -*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, the crew on that, we had about 80-85 people on board, and it was the same class as the Nautilus. It was kind of the Model T of the submarines, as nuclear submarines back then, and so I caught that and so the next operation we did, we went up to the North Pole, and we left Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the USS Scape was our same class as our submarine left New London, Connecticut. We rendezvoused at the North Pole, and we stuck our sails up through the ice and played a baseball game. We had to paint the ball international orange so we could find it in the snow and the ice. But it was a game and Sea Dragon won. But that was the exciting thing. That's something that 99.9 percent of the world population would never have an opportunity to do. So that excited me, and then we did some special ops, and then we came back. Normally you take what you call a West Pac cruise. Of course on the West Coast, we go to Japan, and Yukuska, Japan is our port away from home port, and we did some special operations there and we came back. That was about the time that the Sea Dragon was set for an overhaul, and get a new nuclear core. Now they'll last for the life of the ship, 25 years or so. But then it was about 5 years. And so I took her through the shipyard, and we got out from the shipyard. It was a two and a half year overhaul, and boy it was a lot of work. You can imagine with a nuclear reactor and everything, you had paperwork. What normally would be five or six pages, it would be about a foot or two high. And so I learned to dock there. Then after that, a friend of mine was up on commander of submarine Force US Pacific Fleet staff there at Pearl Harbor, and he said we got an opening. He said would you like to come up there? And I said yeah, I would love to. At that particular time, Admiral E.B. Fluffy, which medal of honor winner, and he was commander of submarine force Pacific Fleet, was the CO, was the Comm set Pac. And so I went up there and I started out in the weapons department, and I went out on the USS Blackfin. I was also, most of my boats that I was on, I was the ship's photographer, too, so I went through periscope photography school. We sunk an old US fleet boat, as a weapons test, using the mark 37 torpedoes, and I've got the picture of it actually exploding underneath it and it raising up in the air, and breaking in two, really. It broke its back and it sunk. So I stayed on that, and then I took over, I made first class while I was on sub PAC staff, and I took over the classified patrol department that handled all the classified documents. I stayed there for another year in that position and during that timeframe, I always liked to shoot, I like to hunt and everything like that, so I talked to the admiral and I said why don't we start a sub PAC rifle team? He said well, that's good. I'll line it up, you set it up, organize it, and I'll get you the money. I said all right. So I did and we had people, actually I had one of my team members was stationed over in Yukuska, Japan, and then another one was an officer out of San Diego, and so we started out and most of those guys were small bore shooters - .22, like that. So we got our emblem grands, national match, special match grade grants, and they would always flinch, anticipating a recall because this is 30 odd 6. So I had to break 'em of that, and the way I would do it, I would take not a blank but just a dummy shell and I'd load it, and then I would hand them the rifle, and they don't know if it's a hot round or if it's a dummy. So you hit that dummy one and everybody would really flinch there, and so I finally broke them of that. This was about, well we didn't have any match ammunition or anything because that was very expensive. We shot armor

piercing which is about pretty close to the same. So we would go out and practice. We got our Grands in February, and I finally got 'em trained where they wouldn't anticipate the recall and everything, and we thought we were good. And the admiral asked me if we were going to go back to the Pacific fleet matches in San Diego. Well, that's all the Marines in the Navy, the best shooters in the Marine and the Navy went back to this. No, I don't think we're ready for this, admiral. He said, well I've got somebody. He said go back and give 'em a taste of it so when the go back to actually compete, they'll know what's going on. Oh, that was good. So we went back. There was a WAVES team. A WAVE is a female Navy person. And so anyway they had been under the instruction for over a year of the SAMTC, Small Arms Marksmanship Training Course, and they were good. They challenged us. That's not gonna be any game, you know, no deal, we're gonna wipe it out. Well, they wiped us out. They got back of the 600 yard line and every one of them were in the bull's eye. They had the best equipment, they had the best instructors, and I was the team captain and the instructor, too, and I had never shot competition rifle before. But anyway they beat us that time. They said well, ya'll gonna be back next year? Yeah, our whole team's gonna be back. I said well, we've got a running, we had a bet with them, whoever lost had to buy the other team a steak dinner. So we had to buy 'em steak dinner. And I said well let's have this same bet for next year because we're gonna come back. Oh, that sounds good. We'll take another steak dinner. I said now, don't be so fast. So anyway, we went back the next year, my same team and everything, too. But we'd had a little chance to do some practicing and shooting and everything and we got a lot better. And I did a lot of shooting in the state matches over in Hawaii and everything, and I won quite a few things, so I was pretty good. And we were shooting the old peep-site M1 National Match, but still the iron sites. And we even shot some 1,000 yard matches. That's a long way off, 1,000 yards with the peep site. We went out to the Marine range there and that's where they trained their snipers at the time. They had 300 H&H Winchesters which were the heavy bullet, very powerful with 23 power scopes for a 1,000 yard match. Well the old gunnery sergeant out there just knew that his Marines were just gonna wipe us out. Well we ended up winning. I won the overall match and we ended up winning the overall match, the team part. Well, they had bought, they spent \$250 on trophies because they knew they were gonna win 'em back. But we took four out of six. Oh, he called them every name in the book. He said you guys are a bunch of squids. That's what the Marines call the Navy, squids. You had a bunch of squids come out here with M-1 grands, iron sites and beat us. You've got the best equipment and everything like that and you let them beat you. Oh, he sent one guy back to get more ammunition. Well, a 300 H&H magnum is a pretty heavy load, it stomps you. But they were hollerin' sarge, they called him gunnie, said gunnie, man, our soldiers are tired. We've already been shootin' like I guess 50 rounds through all the different positions. And he said I don't care if it's bleeding, you're gonna stay out here until we can't see that a shoot, until we can't see that target. And so we felt pretty good. So we went back to the PAC fleet matches the next year and we actually won the match, set a new course record, went back two more years and we won it three years in a row, so we got the perpetual trophy.

*That's great. Let me ask you, sir, a little bit about submarines. How often when you'd go out on one of those deployments, or I guess you called it a float or whatever -*

**Bob Steinman:** West PAC -

*In West PAC, was it about six months you'd be out?*

**Bob Steinman:** Six to eight months.

*And how much of that time would you be submerged?*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, I spent 84 days submerged at one time, in special operations.

*Well, I think because a lot of people when they think of submarines, they think of the Tom Clancy's Hunt for Red October, and small spaces -*

**Bob Steinman:** Oh, they are.

*How do you deal with that for that long a period of time?*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, about the first two weeks you set into a routine. Everybody gets sick because if one person has something, it's an enclosed atmosphere and everything like that, so everybody gets sick within the first two weeks and then nobody gets sick because they've already gone through it and built up the immunity to whatever it was like that. But on the nuclear submarines, we'd make our own oxygen and everything out of sea water, we called it scrubbers and burners. And so I spent one West PAC I spent 10 months over there, because we left San Diego, and sub PAC staff was classified neutral duty. In other words, it wasn't sea duty, it wasn't shore duty. So I had to go back to another sub for a year before I could go to my shore duty. So I went to a Guppy 3. Guppy stands for Greater Underwater Propulsion. It was a modernized fleet boat. The keel was laid in 1947, and then took it and cut it in half in '60, and added a 30-foot section and added more batteries to it because it would have to recharge the batteries with the electric motor. It didn't have the nuclear power. And so it was a great boat. It was just a good boat and I loved it. But we went over with West PAC from San Diego. From San Diego we went to Pago Pago, put in port and stayed three days there, took on fresh water and food and fuel and everything, and then went down to Auckland, New Zealand and operated with their ASW, antisubmarine warfare frigates. They didn't have any submarines. So we were providing services for them. And that was the best liberty port we ever went into, everybody. I mean you couldn't buy a dinner or anything because you were the first Yank submarine that came in to Auckland, New Zealand since World War II, and so I mean the whole town came out, or city came out, and I went up to one of the sporting goods shops because I heard about all the fabulous hunting that they had down there, and so I'd ask them, you know, I had nine people on board that wanted to go hunting, and they said well, hang on Yank. So they made a phone call and this guy comes up and introduces himself as the secretary of the New Zealand deer stoppers. They don't hunt deer, they stop deer. And I told him they had nine guys that wanted to go hunting. He said OK, well fine, we'll set you up, when can you go? Well this was on a Wednesday, and I said well we can go probably Friday, Friday morning. Well they furnished a guide for each man. Now against Naval regulations, our skipper let us bring our own personal weapons on board all except one guy. One guy didn't have one. And so the sporting goods shop furnished a weapon for him. And so anyway they said we'll pick you up Friday morning here at the submarine. And they said we'll furnish all the equipment and the camping gear and the food. And I said, no, we're gonna furnish the food. Well we argued about that, no, no, we'll furnish – I said, only way we're gonna do it is if we furnish the food because I can get it off the boat. And so anyway we went out Friday morning and set up camp and everything, and went out in the bush, that's what they called it, out in the bush. And everybody got something. I got a red stag which is sort of like an elk, I got a laboar and a sinkabuck, and everybody got something though. And we came back at the end of that timeframe and the New Zealand meatpacker's association came and got all the carcasses and everything, and they skinned 'em out, cut the meat up and quick froze it and dried it and wrapped it. So we had exotic game throughout the West PAC. Oh, they were fabulous. And then the sporting goods store had a tannery up in Christ Church.

They took the skins and sent it up there and they tanned ‘em with the hair on and then mailed ‘em to us in Yukuska.

*Wow.*

**Bob Steinman:** It was fabulous.

*How often, I know reading about submarine service, you hear the stories of dealing with the Russian submarines, cat and mouse type stuff.*

**Bob Steinman:** Very definitely.

*Tell us a little bit about your memories of that.*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, our particular job at the time was to, I’m trying to think of the word, but anyway to watch their operations and everything. Of course they didn’t know we were there, and try to set up a war plan for how we were gonna operate against their ASW forces and all. And we had a little Intel that said that their brand new cruisers they just had was gonna come out of, well I think I can say this because it’s been declassified, out of Rostop, and on a certain date and everything like that. So we were up there laying and waiting on them. So it come out and we took pictures of it and everything and got up underneath it and found out where all their compartments from the water inlet take. We had a camera that would shoot up and we could actually take pictures. I mean we were within maybe 10 feet of the bottom. And so surveyed that and everything like that. In fact, we went all around it and the skipper would let us come, everybody on the ship could come up and look at it through the periscope.

*Your ship was that confident that they couldn’t hear you?*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, they didn’t have any active sonar going. They were confident enough that they didn’t think we would be there. So they weren’t operating. So we went around it until everybody in the crew came up and looked at it through the scope. Then we went on and did some other operations, and at the same time, this was on that Guppy 3 that we did that.

*This was in the ‘60s?*

**Bob Steinman:** Yes. And ’66, ’67. And we did our, of course going down to Auckland and places like that extended the six-month trip into eight months, and then just as we were ready to come back, the commander of the submarine flotilla out that was in charge of all the subs out in the Pacific fleet there, called the skipper up and said hey, we got a situation, and we’re going to have to put you out on another patrol, 30-day patrol. And so they couldn’t say anything about what happened until we actually got out to sea. And that’s when the Pueblo got captured. So we were the first American war ship up in the area.

*Responding to that.*

**Bob Steinman:** That’s right. And they wouldn’t let us do anything except observe. Well we knew the skipper, Commander Bucher was the skipper of that which was an old Army tub is what it was, maybe 8 knots.

*North Koreans still have it on display today?*

**Bob Steinman:** Yeah, they do. Maybe 8 knots. Now most, they had requested 20 mm guns for protection, but they gave them .50 calibers. Well, .50 calibers, that's a big gun and it goes a long ways, but the Korean patrol boats had at least 20 mm on it. So they could stand off out of the range of the .50's and just shell that ship. Well, we went up there, and we could see the mast hit. We got right up into the harbor and we could see the mastheads of the Pueblo there, but they never let us do anything. Then they finally sent another sub up to relieve us, but we were up there over a month.

*But you were aboard a submarine during that time. You mentioned after two weeks you got kind of into a routine or so. Did you have, because obviously a submarine is 24/7, did you work 12-hour shifts normally, or 8-hour shifts?*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, it was 6 on, and 18 off. And during that 6 on, you ran it, now I did most, like I say I was the administrative and there was only one person, one yeoman on board, and I had a striker, which is a seaman, E3, that worked for me when he wasn't working other parts. And during mine, even though I was administration and everything like that, I was still on the planes, I was a battle planesman. Now I didn't stand any other watches other than that from the battle planes. And so we ended up he would come in and work for maybe a couple of hours, but the way it's set up is that you have your 6 hours that you are at your particular station there, and then you could be off and you had maybe at the most 6 hours to sleep, but the rest of the time you were either studying for advancement or studying for qualification on the sub. So there's not a great amount of free time at all.

*What was the food like?*

**Bob Steinman:** The food was fantastic, I mean the best food in any of the services. We call 'em skimmers, those are the guys in the surface ships. They're on targets is what they're on. We don't call 'em surface, we call 'em targets. And anyway, they would get a big hunk of meat and they would call it six-way beef, and they could cut it up in steaks or roast or hamburger or whatever like that. We had t-bone steaks, just the finest. They were what they called a sub pack. The sub pack consisted of these better cuts of meat. We had steak and lobster at least once or twice a week. Our cooks were certified chefs.

*That was kind of a way of keeping the morale up I guess.*

**Bob Steinman:** That is 90 percent of your morale when you're at sea like that.

*Because you're in a hard type ship duty in a submarine like that for so long.*

**Bob Steinman:** That's right. There's always something going on, even in the sleeping quarters. I slept up in the forward torpedo room on a torpedo skid, and I had just a regular bunk that was tied down to that.

*Did you have to share, did you have to hot rod?*

**Bob Steinman:** I didn't hot rod because by the time I was there, I was at least second class. Although as a non-qual, I was still second class, and I was doing my quals and everything like that. That's still going on now even with the new bunks, the hot bunking, the junior enlisted.

*There's not enough room.*

**Bob Steinman:** No, well the new boats, the Virginia class got 135 people on board, and yeah, they're much larger than what the old boats were, but still not that much.

*How would you stay in physical health? Did you have any chance to exercise?*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, they can now, like on the boomers, the half BM submarines, they have a section back in what they call Sherwood Forest which is where the missile tubes are, back there where they have exercise equipment. We didn't have that room. So we had weights and the big thing we'd have to do is push away from the table. You had five meals a day – breakfast, lunch, and supper, plus you had soup downs in between when they were leaving the watch.

*They have what they sometimes call like midnight rights?*

**Bob Steinman:** Yeah, mid rights. And so we had one spook that came aboard and rode us, and that was the special intelligence part that came. He gained 31 pounds in 30 days. He had bar uniforms. We kept telling him, and he was just an old farm boy that can speak a couple of languages, and he couldn't push away. I mean a big platter of steaks and everything, mashed potatoes. We'd have cherries jubilee and baked Alaska for dessert, and you had a big ice cream machine. He couldn't push away. We kept telling him, you're not gonna be able to get out of the hatch the way you're going. But anyway, after that, after I got off of the bottom door there, I stayed on board for a year and did my year, I was up for shore duty. Well, there's no sub bases in Texas, so the only thing I could do to get back to Texas, I went to the naval air station.

*Up in Dallas?*

**Bob Steinman:** No, I went to the naval air station in Beeville. They don't have it anymore. It's now a prison. But we trained advanced jet pilots there, and I went out with the skipper, out as the admin chief and I went out with the skipper and I landed aboard the arrested landing on the Lexington and did my catapult off the Lexington with the skipper, which was an exciting thing. Once was enough. It's just like they say, landing on carriers, nothing but a controlled crash, and that's it. And we were flying out there, a beautiful day, the Gulf was just as flat as it could be. Well there it is, see that little speck out there? I said skipper, you've done this before, right? He said oh yeah. And so we did that and I can't imagine what it would be like to land on a carrier in a stormy night at night, with the deck going up and down, because at night you don't have that depth perception.

*Well it's neat you got to experience that. Most people don't -*

**Bob Steinman:** That's right, they never had that chance. So I was fortunate in my entire Navy career. I got to the places I wanted to be. Then when I left there, while I was there I got awarded the Navy achievement medal, too, for superior work with the admin, and then we had a major inspection and they checked all of our officers' records and I was in charge of admin plus the officers' records, and they didn't find a single error in any of them, so I got the Navy achievement medal out of that. I spent three years there and then I went back out to Pearl to the USS Swordfish. While I was on sub PAC staff, too, the USS Kamaya Mayo which is a boomer, a fleet ballistic missile sub, came out on this first missile patrol. Well, the yeoman aboard got ill and he had appendicitis and they had to stay in. Well, to be on these you've got to have special clearances, and I had top secret special intelligence clearance. So they were asking around to get

somebody to take that, and I volunteered to take that. So I took the Kamaya Mayo as first missile patrol, and I decided right then and there that I was going to stay with fast attacks because although I was busy and had work to do, it was boring because we never got up into areas that we weren't supposed to be and all that type of stuff, and I had been depth charged, and because we had a casualty back in the engineering, and spun out a bearing in one of the fresh water pumps and they heard us, so they came after us.

*When was that?*

**Bob Steinman:** This was in '64.

*A Soviet?*

**Bob Steinman:** Yeah, and we went up underneath an icepack. They didn't have any of their submarines around, and we went up underneath an icepack. Well, they couldn't follow us because the ice was across it, but we knew that they would be getting some submarines. They had all their ASW choppers and everything else out there, and they just kind of set up a line waiting on us to come out or waiting for subs, and we knew their subs were going to come out after us. So we put the pedal to the medal and went out real fast, and they were just sitting there. By the time they cranked up, they heard us, and by the time they cranked up, of course at our speed that we were doing, we were cavitating, them screws were and everything making noise, and then they cranked up and took out after us. Well, their screws on their own ship was making so much noise they couldn't hear us, so we turned around and went back, and they thought that we kept going, so they went to go and we went back and then turned and took out. But before we got up underneath the icepack, they did depth charge us. They heard us and everything. They started out with what we call a PDC, a practice depth charge, which is nothing more than a grenade, and they put it down and said hey, we know you're down there, come on up. And then when we didn't come up and there was no way we were gonna come up, when we didn't come up then they played the big ones. But they didn't get close enough to do any damage.

*What's that sound like aboard the submarine?*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, you hear these things where the detonator goes off, there's a click, and then there's a loud, of course it depends on how close they are.

*How did it sound when you guys were getting depth charged?*

**Bob Steinman:** We heard the click, and there was movement, it rocked the boat and everything like that, but we got away from them and I think they dropped probably I think there was 8 to 10 depth charges before we got away from them.

*Definitely part of the Cold War then.*

**Bob Steinman:** That's it. Have you read Blind Man's Bluff?

*No, but is that about the Scorpion and the Thresher?*

**Bob Steinman:** Well no, it's about the Cold War, all the deals like with the Russian submarine that we brought up and everything like that. If you read it, Swordfish is in there and I was on that operation that they're talking about.

*Now is that the one that used glow more explore, the used ship?*

**Bob Steinman:** Yes, right.

*I hadn't read about that. I was gonna ask you a little bit about that, too, because I know the Thresher and the Scorpion, the two submarines that were lost, and that was in the 60s, wasn't it?*

**Bob Steinman:** Yes it was, when the Thresher, we were actually at sea, I was actually at sea on Swordfish, and I was taking, I was in radio taking the, what we had is a floating wire that we put up so we wouldn't be caught on radar or anything like that, and I was taping the news. It was about 1 o'clock in the morning, and I was kind of dozing off, too, and I heard that the Thresher was lost with all hands, plus the shipyard people that were on board. Boy, it woke me up. I stopped it and played it back, and sure enough. So I went in and got the skipper and told him about it. That was on Thursday. On that Sunday, we held a memorial service for them, and the skipper got a message, too, that due to that if there was anybody that wanted to dequal – in other words, the submarine service is all volunteer service, still is – that wanted to devolunteer and get off, then we need to find that out, and that port we got into they transferred. Nobody took that opportunity.

*Did they ever, what was the talk like amongst the submarine community about what actually happened, because I know the government to this day has kind of been questioned or been quiet.*

**Bob Steinman:** There's a set of books about yea big that goes in, has pictures of the boat, the Scorpion and everything, and in fact I had it up, when I was on sub PAC staff I had it up in there, and I went through it. Now, I didn't read it all, but I looked at all the pictures and read the narrative and everything, and of course then the Scorpion, too. They said oh, the Russians said that we had hit one of their boats and this and that. Of course the Russians had lost many boats, and so, but the Scorpion never has had a definite reason, a cause of that. Now they knew what happened with the Thresher. What happened, the Scorpion had just gotten out of an overhaul and they had put in some new high pressure blow nozzles. On the submarine you've got what they call the captain's bait, high pressure bottles in there, 3,000-pound air, so in case you have to, I don't know if you've ever seen a picture of a submarine coming up out of the water -

*Sure, yeah.*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, that's the emergency blow. So you got 3,000-pound air coming up, and in from ballast tanks, giving you a positive buoyancy. Well, those particular nozzles, they tried to tighten them down and make them smaller so the air is more pressure, well they froze, and they froze over, so the air wasn't going through enough to – they were operating at test depth at max speed. They were in a thermal layer. Thermal layer is total water and it's heavier, so there's more resistance, so you've got to hold your planes, your depth planes down a little bit to keep from being pushed up. Well they were in a thermal layer, they ran out of the thermal layer, they were already at test depth, and they tried to blow. When they tried to blow, the air wasn't going through there in time and they went down and hit the bottom, and it imploded.

*Because of the pressure?*

**Bob Steinman:** Yeah. Plate ballistic missile on that submarine, when they go out, they've got a string, they'll put a string across from one side to the other, port side to starboard side, and tie it

tight. When they get down to their operating pressure, that string has 8-inch drag in it, a curve, because of the pressure from that pressure hull will actually push it in and crush it in, so there's 8 inches it will drag down.

*They do that -*

**Bob Steinman:** Just now, right.

*So that's kind of a warning type system?*

**Bob Steinman:** No, it's just to see -

*Just to demonstrate it.*

**Bob Steinman:** Yeah. But the pressure is very strong down there, no question.

*Oh I'm sure. Now what do you think happened with the other submarine?*

**Bob Steinman:** The Thresher was due for an overhaul. They gave it an extended, oh like a special ops type thing. They don't know what actually caused it, but the emergency blower system did not work right, and so that's what happened with that.

*So you don't buy into the conspiracy theories that it was a Soviet -*

**Bob Steinman:** No, that's just hearsay and they had to figure out something to say.

*It sells a lot of books I'm sure.*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, here's the situation, too, and of course you've heard that WAVE will go aboard submarines now and everything, well, it's not gonna work, I'll tell you right now. It's just too close. Even on the FBM, they're already gonna put 'em right now in FBM's, and it's just too close. On a fast attack like that, even com sub \_\_\_ voted against it for the simple reason he said, my whole staff is made up of pregnant women that go to sea on these surface ships, and they get pregnant. Don't know how it happened, but they get pregnant.

*That's no exaggeration.*

**Bob Steinman:** And so what happens is after 10 weeks, you're pregnant for 10 weeks, and they're 10 weeks along, they can't send 'em to sea because of complications. So they have to give them to shore base. But now the guys at sea that's due for shore can't come ashore because there's no billets for 'em, and it creates a lot of hypertension between the two. And it's gonna happen on subs, too. I don't care, you know, you're so crammed in, you can't take and assign a compartment for just women.

*No, I agree.*

**Bob Steinman:** And you only have three showers and heads onboard. It's just not gonna work. Now on the FBM's it's feasible, but it still won't work. I guess you've heard they lost, they relieved what, 27, 30 skippers last year, the Navy did, because of inappropriate actions. Now some of the skippers, there's one female captain they got rid of, too. I get these DOD briefings

everyday on the Internet, and one of them, she was giving favors to the women on board and officers and everything, and treating the men, or the enlisted, even the officers and everybody like that, and give them all the dirty details so the WAVE women wouldn't have to do it. She got relieved for cause.

*That's not good, you can't have that.*

**Bob Steinman:** But anyway, after went back from VP-24 down to Beeville and I went back out to Pearl to the USS Swordfish, another fast attack nuke, and then from there I went back to Corpus Christi, naval air station at Corpus Christi and retired out of Corpus Christi. It was 1977.

*That's great. So you did 20 years –*

**Bob Steinman:** 20 years and 28 days. That's one of the nice things about being a yeoman, you know what's going on and you know how to work the system, and the skipper, I put in my papers for transfer to fleet reserve. You don't retire until after 30 years. And transferred to fleet reserve for 10 years and then they send you your retirement paper. I put in my papers to retire and came up and said chief, I can't sign this recommending approval. I said why? And he said well, for one thing you run this squadron. I was leading chief down there, too. And he said you run this squadron, I need you. He said you can't go until I go. I says skipper, how long have you known me? He said well, about two years, two and a half years now. I said do you think I would allow that to happen? Kind of looked at him. What do you mean allow it to happen? I said we don't work like you do – you serve at the whim of the secretary of the Navy. He can keep you as long as he wants to. I'm under a contract. I'm under an enlistment. My enlistment's up at this timeframe. I said do you really think I would allow it to happen any other way? He said well, I'm gonna put you on operation of the hull. I said, you can't do that either because you're not an operational squadron, you're a training squadron. I said you can't make an operational hull. I said there's no way you can keep me here. He said damn, I might've known you had it all figured out. I said you bet.

*That's great. So after you retired, then you eventually came –*

**Bob Steinman:** I came to Round Rock. I had about a four-day retirement. I went to work for the state comptroller and I managed the outgoing mailroom for the state comptroller, which is the largest mailroom in the state agency. I did that, and the assistant comptroller asked me if I would, what did I know about building a warehouse? I said well I know it's gotta be big enough, you know, just the basics. He said would you build it? We want a warehouse. Would you build a warehouse for us? I said sure. So I designed the state comptroller's warehouse, the one they have right now, and they wanted to make it two-story and go up an area that they wanted to put it in, or anything like that, that it would be very expensive to go two-story. And they said well, it would take too much room to just build one story and put everything we want to put on there. I said why? He said well, you can only put so much weight so high. I happened to know that they had a forklift that would actually, the fork and everything would actually pivot and turn. So I said what we'll do, this forklift will take 2000 pounds and put it up 22 feet. I said we're gonna build it where we can put our pallets up on 22 foot with this forklift. That forklift cost \$67,000 at the time. But instead of having to have 10-foot aisles where you can actually turn a forklift to go into it like that, I could have 6-foot office because that would swivel. And so I was doing that. I made it one-story, I did it in a smaller area that they wanted, and everything worked perfect. That's when the state went broke back in the 80s. And so our illustrious comptroller, Bob

Bullock, appointed one of his, I don't know how long if you knew Bob or anything else like that, but he was kind of a little hipper. I know you heard that.

*I heard stories about how he would fire people, then hire 'em back.*

**Bob Steinman:** Oh well, he'd fire 'em one day and hire 'em back the next day. But anyway, he gave one of his good drinking buddies the department manager that oversaw all of us, well this guy didn't know beans. And he said well I'm gonna make a big name for myself, so we're gonna get rid of all the middle managers and cut that cost out. Well, about 30 of us, over 40, now if I'd have known then what I knew now, they couldn't do that because we were in a special class. So anyway he said what we'll do for you, we're just gonna make you a warehouse man. I save this agency \$57,000-\$80,000 a year just in refurbished – I was refurbishing furniture and stuff like that and sending it back – because his group, the secretaries and the other people out there were a bunch of spoiled people. The edge would come off the desk, and they would turn that desk in and get a brand new one. And these were big, wooden desks. And so I'd fix that and send it back to 'em. Their baskets were oak and stuff, I mean really expensive stuff, and so they put little labels on there, and had to change it, so they would turn those in and want to get new ones. I'd take and soak those off. I said you don't put a label on anyway. Just put the label over the old label. And so I wouldn't buy 'em new stuff and I'd send it back. So I started my own refurbishing and did that, and we had people coming from, well mostly it came from the truck drivers that came and saw how efficient we were. They said I was going to have to have 10 people on my crew to run that warehouse there. I had 5 and ran it just as smooth as it could be. Because before there was no organization, and I organized it and set it up. But anyway, we did all that and everything with the comptroller. That was fun, I enjoyed it, but then I had to go out and do something else. So I was a property manager for several buildings and everything. And then CompuAd, I don't know if you've ever heard of CompuAd, it's a computer manufacturing company. We were bigger than Dell at the same time. But Hayden was the owner of it and he wanted it to be the largest, have the largest, privately-owned computer manufacturing company in the United States. We were even international.

*When was this?*

**Bob Steinman:** This was '85 to '92. And we had offices all over, or stores all over the United States.

*CompUSA?*

**Bob Steinman:** No, CompuAd.

*OK, I've not heard of them.*

**Bob Steinman:** Anyway, so he opened up a bunch of retail stores, but he only had CompuAd stuff. Well, CompuAd didn't have everything, and so people would come and they'd want to buy something else and he didn't have it, so they would go somewhere else. Then we got during the Gulf War, the first one, they wanted 30 computers, special built computers, and they wanted it within 30 days, and nobody else bid on it because they didn't figure they could do it. So Hayden said OK, we're gonna do it. So he bid on it and we got it. We put on 7 day a week and 24 hours a day shift, and we built 'em. They sent, the Army shipped them over to Iraq, and the Army sent I think something like 25 computer nerds over there to fix 'em. They didn't need fixing. We built special cases to ship them there and everything. The only thing that happened

is some of the motherboards had a cold solder joint that broke loose and it wasn't our fault, it was the motherboard. And only one of them. The rest of them worked perfectly. So we started getting government contracts. We built all of the point of sale cash registers and everything like that for JC Penney. We built them all for Sears. We had all the notebook contracts for the Academy's, everything, and a lot of his stores, the people were selling equipment out the back door, and so he closed all of them down and went into financial, they went into bankruptcy and we came out within six months. I was one of the last, I was in charge of receiving for the company, and sometimes we received a million, million and a half dollars worth of equipment a day, or parts. So they got rid of the warehouse man, in charge of the manager, and so I took that over. I was responsible for \$25 million worth of parts, but then they finally went under, and when they did, I went out to Round Rock and the guy that bought the lot next to where I lived was the owner of Classic out there, and so I asked him if he had a place, and he said well what can you do? I said you name it, I can do it. He said do you know anything about personnel work? I said yeah, I was a chief petty officer in the Navy and had a lot of people working for me. He said can you write a personnel manual, human resource manual? I said yup. I wrote a good one and they loved it. So I worked for him 10 years, and then I decided to retire, and that was 2005.

*So now you come down here and volunteer some at the museum?*

**Bob Steinman:** I've been down here for six years.

*That's great. This is a nice spot and I'm sure you enjoy it with all the history.*

**Bob Steinman:** Oh, I do enjoy it, with no question.

*The one last thing before, you know this interview is to be saved for posterity. We have documents at the Land Office that go back to the 1600s. We have the original Registro that Stephen F. Austin kept in his own hand, the settlers that came to Texas, and we have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received when he was killed at the Alamo.*

**Bob Steinman:** Is that on display?

*People can go see it. It's not publicly displayed, but occasionally they bring it out, and anybody can go down there and request a tour.*

**Bob Steinman:** That would be neat. Like I say, I'm a historian.

*With that in mind, is there anything you'd want to say to somebody listening to this interview potentially hundreds of years from now about your service or any of that sort of thing?*

**Bob Steinman:** Well, the only thing I can say is that I don't like the way America is going right now, and our illustrious president, not mine, but our illustrious president is just ruining America. I'm glad I'm out of the Navy the way it's going. I'm glad that I'm as old as I am so I don't have to see it go down any further than this. But I tell all the kids that I talk to at schools and everything, I said you've got the ability to do what you want to do if you just apply yourself. I said it's up to you. And I tell every one of them this. My wife was a teacher for 35 years, and I tell every one of them this, and I try to inspire them. I said you've got to learn now what you're expected to know because the next grade you go into, they expect you to know everything you were supposed to learn now. If you don't, you've got a lot of catching up to do and all this new

stuff is thrown at you and you're not going to be able to keep up. But you can do what you want to do. And Texas has been good as far as with its I guess housing market, with its employment and everything. We've done well, much better than other states, and we're hurting now too just like everybody is hurting, America is hurting. And I get so dad-gum mad at the people that want something for nothing, because I had to work for everything I have, and I've done pretty good. But I expect other people to, too. But they don't want to do it. They want something for nothing.

*Well sir, I want to thank you though for your service. Commissioner Patterson and everybody at the Land Office, it's just one small way for us to say thank you.*

**Bob Steinman:** I'd like to point out one other thing that I tell you about my brother was in World War II, well my son just retired from the Navy about three years ago as a Navy pilot, and he was the CO of the largest naval squadron for the Navy out in Guam, and he's still working with the Navy and the Army. He's the project manager for the anti-chemical, the anti-biological warfare for the United States at this time.

*So he kept that Navy tradition going.*

**Bob Steinman:** All the way through, and he's got twin boys and I don't know if they're going to go into the Navy or not. It's just like my son whenever he graduated from high school, I told him, I said Mike, I can get you an appointment to the Academy. He said dad, I've been in the Navy all my life. He said I want to see what I can do outside. Well he went to A&M, graduated from A&M, came to work here for about a year and a half, and came up one day and said you know, I'd really like to fly. We'd been to air stations and everything. I said well put in for it. He did, and he got accepted and did extremely well, and got a promotion every time. He was selected for captain with the same thing as Burt Kerner, but they were gonna send him to a bird farm, well a carrier. That's what we call a carrier. He was gonna be air boss, but carriers never stay in anymore. They're gone, just like the sub now because we don't have enough subs to meet all the requirements that they give us. And then they were gonna send him to \_\_\_\_\_. He said I spent 20 years staying out of Washington DC, so he put in his papers to retire. He was working for a four star general, and the general came down and told him the same thing my skipper when I tried to retire. He said you can't go because you run it. I just sign the paper, you run it, you know what's going on, nobody else does. He said but what I'll do, I'll create a billet for you as an independent contractor if you'll come back and do what you do now, and I'll let you retire. So he did. He doesn't really like it because of all the bureaucratic red tape and all the waste in the politics involved. He's done more now from home than he was when he was on the sea duty because he's got to fly all over the United States, all over the world really with these programs.

*Well sir, again, thank you for –*

**Bob Steinman:** My pleasure.

*[End of recording]*